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ABSTRACT

Although it has been shown that physical attractiveness is an advantage to male applicants for managerial positions, it is not clear whether attractiveness is an advantage or disadvantage to female applicants for these jobs. Male (N=25) and female (N=22) business administration students were asked to simulate selection decisions for a high level managerial job by ranking applicants who varied according to sex, physical attractiveness and managerial characteristics. The results indicated no significant differences in hiring decisions between male and female or graduate and undergraduate subjects. Strong main effects were found for managerial characteristics while modest main effects were found for attractiveness. Applicants with managerial characteristics perceived as jointly ascribed to successful managers and men (leader ability, aggressiveness, emotional stability) were chosen significantly more often than those with characteristics jointly ascribed to successful managers and women (intuitiveness, humanitarian values, awareness of others' feelings). Attractive applicants were ranked significantly higher than unattractive applicants. There were no sex effects or significant interactions. (Author/NRB)

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The Effects of Applicant Attractiveness, Managerial Attributes and Gender on Executive Employment Decisions

by

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ABSTRACT

Prior selection research about the effects of sex role stereotypes and physical attractiveness on female applicants for managerial jobs has been equivocal. The present study tested hypotheses from both the sex role stereotype and the attractiveness literatures. Although the attractiveness literature would suggest that attractive applicants would be chosen regardless of sex, there is evidence from the sex role stereotype literature that attractive women are sometimes at a disadvantage. One possible reason has to do with the perceived characteristics of men and women which may be heightened by their attractiveness. Subjects were asked to simulate selection decisions for a high level managerial job by ranking applicants who varied according to sex, physical attractiveness and managerial characteristics. Strong main effects were found for managerial characteristics while modest main effects were found for attractiveness. Applicants with managerial characteristics perceived as jointly ascribed to successful managers and men were chosen significantly more often than those with characteristics jointly ascribed to successful managers and women. Also, attractive applicants were ranked as more desirable. There were no sex effects nor were there any significant interactions.

Although it has been shown that physical attractiveness is an advantage to male applicants for managerial positions (Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979), it is not clear whether attractiveness is an advantage or disadvantage to female applicants for these jobs. Given that women may be perceived as having different attributes than men, does being attractive help or hinder them when competing for jobs perceived as requiring characteristics typically associated with men? Possible answers to these questions are suggested by research in two areas, sex role stereotypes and physical attractiveness.

Sex Role Stereotypes

There is considerable evidence to suggest that people hold implicit social psychological theories about the differences that exist among people in general and between the sexes in particular (Shaver, 1977, p. 15). One strong implicit sex role theory – that men and women have different traits – has been demonstrated by empirical research (Bem, 1974; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson & Rosenkrantz, 1972). For example, subjects in one study attributed traits such as objectivity, self-confidence, decisiveness, leadership ability, aggressiveness, power, dominance, independence, competitiveness, and logical thinking to men and not to women. Further, these masculine traits were rated by sub-

jects as most socially desirable (Broverman et al., 1972).

A second firmly rooted implicit theory or stereotype asserts that men make the best managers. Schein (1973) showed that successful middle managers were perceived as having 60 characteristics typically ascribed to men in general and not to women in general. These salient characteristics included aggressiveness, self-reliance, objectivity, emotional stability, and decisiveness. This means there is a large overlap in attributes between successful managers and masculine sex role stereotypes. It follows that men are likely to be seen as highly suitable for managerial jobs because they are perceived as having traits associated with good managers.

In contrast, only 8 managerial characteristics were attributed jointly to successful managers and women. They included understanding, helpfulness, intuitiveness, neatness, sophistication, awareness of feelings, and having humanitarian values. Such attributes make up only a tiny fraction of the total female attribute set. The balance of characteristics ascribed to women are sex role typed as "feminine." These feminine attributes are seen as bipolar opposites of masculine attributes by most people (Bem, 1974)[1]. That is, characteristics common to men and managers (dominant, independent) are perceived to have opposites ascribed to women (submissive, dependent). This means that the vast majority of female attributes are, by definition, both "not masculine" and "not manager." This suggests that qualified women have

less chance of being selected for managerial jobs than men of equal ability (Cash, Gillen & Burns, 1977; Cohen & Bunker, 1975; Dipboye, Fromkin & Wiback, 1975; Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979) because they are perceived as having traits incompatible with managers.

It seems reasonable that variables accentuating characteristics ascribed to women and not to men or "manager" may evoke the prototypical image of women as feminine or "not manager". It follows that this salient stereotype would decrease the probability of unbiased consideration of female candidates for managerial jobs. Conversely, variables which serve to neutralize attributes usually assigned to women and not to managers could reduce the impact of such stereotypes and permit a more objective evaluation of the candidate.

Physical Attractiveness

One variable that has been shown to impact on the salience of feminine and masculine attributes is physical attractiveness. Attractive women are seen as more feminine and attractive men as more masculine than their unattractive cohorts (Gillen, 1975 as reported in Cash et al., 1977). The attractiveness literature has generally supported the thesis, "what is beautiful is good" (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1982). That is, attractive people are perceived by most people to have better personalities, more prestigious occupations and better prospects for happy social and professional lives (Dion et al., 1972).

When this thesis is applied to the choice of candidates for employment or promotion, it means that attractive candidates have a better probability of being selected than unattractive applicants. Indeed, two early studies did demonstrate small main effects of attractiveness on the selection process (Carlson, 1967; Dipboye, Fromkin & Wiback, 1975).

The first direct indication in the literature that "what is beautiful is good" might not hold for women applying for managerial positions came in a study by Heilman & Saruwatari (1979). They compared attractive and unattractive candidates of both sexes for both a managerial and non-managerial job. Their results showed that attractive men were consistently chosen for both jobs. However, unattractive women were preferred for the managerial job while attractive women were chosen for the non-managerial position. It is important to note that, in this study, there were no sex main effects. Females were chosen as frequently as males for either type of job.

An examination of prior selection related attractiveness literature discloses a similar trend for unattractive women to be preferred over attractive women for some jobs (Cash, Gillen & Burns, 1977; Dipboye, Avery & Terpstra, 1977). In a between subjects design, Cash et al. (1977) asked subjects to rate one applicant for each of six jobs -- 2 masculine, 2 feminine, and 2 neuter. Examination of their means (Table 1, p. 304) reveals that, although men are pre-

ferred for masculine jobs, unattractive females applying for such jobs were higher on all variables (degree of qualification, success expectancy, hiring recommendation) than attractive females. Likewise, in Dipboye et al. (1977) highly qualified unattractive women were selected from the pool of possible job applicants second only to highly qualified attractive males. Further, attractive and average women were chosen last, but with equal frequency.

In summary, there is reason to question the thesis, "what is beautiful is good" in job selection of women. The literature does support an attractiveness hypothesis for male job applicants. Attractive men are consistently preferred to unattractive men for all types of jobs. However, evidence for the attractiveness hypothesis for women applicants is equivocal and the mechanisms are not clear. Attractiveness may be a liability for women applying for jobs perceived as requiring characteristics and abilities typically associated with men.

The current study was designed to test the relationship of attractiveness, managerial attributes and sex on managerial job selection. Three hypotheses were tested. (1) Attractive men will be ranked higher on managerial suitability than unattractive men. A directional hypothesis is not advanced for women since there is evidence for both advantages and disadvantages of attractives. (2) Applicants with attributes associated with successful managers and men will have a ranking advantage over those with attributes

associated with successful managers and women, regardless of their sex or attractiveness. (3) This study also provides a test of the sex bias hypothesis that men will be systematically ranked higher than women on managerial suitability.

METHOD

Subjects

Three classes of business administration students at the University of South Florida participated in the study. These three natural groups yielded a sample of 47 subjects - 22 women and 25 men. In one group there were 14 female and 7 male undergraduate business students who were employed during the day and attended class at night. The other two classes combined were made up of 8 female and 18 male graduate students enrolled in the Master of Science in Management Program. These people were primarily managers and supervisors who were earning their degree attending weekend classes. The mean age of the combined sample was 30 (S.D. = 8.3), ranging from 19 to 51 years.

Design

The design was a 2x2x2 repeated measures factorial with the independent variables being applicant sex, applicant managerial attributes (Manager/Men and Manager/Women) and applicant physical attractiveness (attractive and unattractive). Rater sex and class were compared to determine if differences existed before combining data.

Procedure

Stimulus materials for each subject were contained in a large manilla envelope. Included were an introduction, brief description of the job, the company and its problems, details of several qualifications that were common to all of the applicants, a set of 8 individualized applicant summaries, and a manipulation check questionnaire.

The experimental task was completed by the undergraduate subjects and one group of graduate students in regular class sessions under the supervision of the researcher. The exercise took one hour to complete. In the second graduate class the researcher introduced the study and distributed the packets for subjects to fill out at home and return by mail. All but 5 of this group returned the completed packets within two weeks.

After a brief introduction, the following profile of TRONCO Corporation and the job information was presented.

In the Eastern Division of TRONCO Corporation 3 large plants in 2 states employ a total of 6,800 workers. For the past two years TRONCO has suffered a decline under relatively weak management. This has resulted in many crisis situations and alarming financial losses. It is well known in business circles that TRONCO top brass are looking for someone to solve the problems and turn things around. The successful candidate will have complete authority, answering only to the president. Salary is approximately $95,000 plus fringe benefits and is negotiable.

Each subject received information about 8 applicants who differed along the dimensions of attractiveness, sex, and managerial attributes. Subjects read a paragraph which equated the applicants on several pre-screening criteria including education and experience. Also, they

were told that all applicants were between the ages of 35 and 48.

One page descriptions of each candidate contained the independent variable manipulations. These individualized summaries described the unique and highly successful prior achievements of eight finalists. Six constant factors were built into all 8 summaries in an attempt to make them equally powerful independent of the experimental manipulations. Each applicant (1) took over a company that had been in poor condition; (2) launched an extensive new program successfully; (3) handled a crisis situation; (4) cut costs; (5) improved either profit, sales, or growth position; and (6) was praised as "outstanding."

Managerial Attributes were manipulated as follows. The Manager/Men adjectives (Schein, 1973) of aggressiveness, leadership ability, emotional stability, independence, objectivity, and decisiveness were embedded in 4 of the summaries. Manager/Women adjectives (Schein, 1973) of understanding, humanitarian values, helpfulness, neatness, awareness of feelings, and intuitiveness were embedded in the other four summaries. Each unique summary was first written depicting a successful male applicant. They were then duplicated substituting feminine pronouns to depict a female applicant. These 16 summaries represented two sets of stimulus materials that were counterbalanced to preclude confounding of particular summaries with the other variables.

Physical Attractiveness and Sex: Physical attractiveness (attractive vs. unattractive) and sex of applicants were manipulated by attaching to the summaries photographs of men and women. These photographs were previously part of a sample of 26 male and 26 female pictures that were rated on attractiveness by an independent sample of 100 undergraduate psychology students. Pictures having the highest and lowest mean values were selected for the study.

Dependent variables: Subjects were told to assume a role as member of a high status selection committee commissioned to choose a Vice President that would "turn things around" for the troubled division. They made a hiring decision by ranking the 8 candidates from most (1) to least (8) suitable for the position. Also, they rated each applicant on several 9 point bipolar adjective scales (High = 9; Low = 1; See Table 1 for list).

Analysis: The data were analyzed with SPSS MANOVA Program, using the multivariate analysis of variance for within subjects designs (Hull & Nie, 1981, p. 50). A separate 2x2x2 ANOVA was conducted for each dependent variable. Each subject's rank for each of the 8 candidates was used as the hiring decision dependent variable.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses showed that there were no significant differences in hiring decisions between male and female or graduate and undergraduate subjects. Data for these groups were combined for all subsequent analyses.

Manipulation Checks: Analyses of variance on the bipolar adjectives verified successful experimental manipulations of the independent variables. On the attractive/unattractive trait scale, previously rated attractive and unattractive candidates were rated respectively above and below the midpoint and were significantly different from each other (attractive = 7.9, unattractive = 4.4; $F(1,45) = 154.21$, $p. < .001$). That is, attractive candidates were seen as attractive while unattractive applicants were seen as unattractive (Table 3). Furthermore, male applicants were rated more masculine while female applicants were rated more feminine (M = 6.8, F = 3.4; $F(1,45) = 121.47$, $p. < .001$; Table 1).

The managerial attributes manipulation was found significant on three trait scales each (Table 2). The Manager/Men (M/M) attributes of leader ability, aggressiveness, and emotional stability were assessed by the adjectives strong leader/weak leader, aggressive/unaggressive, and emotional/unemotional. Applicants with these attributes

were rated lower in emotion (M/M = 4.5, M/W = 5.8; F(1,46 = 40.86, p.< .001), and higher in both aggressiveness (M/M = 7.4, M/W = 6.4; F(1,45) = 34.45, p.< .001) and leadership ability (M/M = 7.4, M/W = 6.5; F(1,46) = 30.75, p.< .001). The Manager Women (M/W) attributes of intuitiveness, humanitarian values, and awareness of feelings of others were assessed by the adjectives intuitive/unintuitive, people oriented/not people oriented, and feeling/unfeeling. Applicants with M/W ascribed attributes were rated higher on intuition (M/M = 6.5, M/W = 6.8; F(1,46) = 3.70, p.< .059), feeling (M/M = 6.0, M/W = 7.1; F(1,46) = 27.62, p.< .001), and humanitarian values (M/M = 6.3, M/W = 7.7; F(1,46) = 64.48, p.< .001. The 8 candidates were all rated well above the midpoint (High = 9, Low = 1) on all adjective trait scales except masculine/feminine and emotional/unemotional. Further, there were significant differences in the expected direction on all of the trait scales except intuitive/unintuitive, which was marginally significant at p.< .059.

Tests of Hypotheses

There were no main effects for applicant sex on the hiring decision (Male = 4.5, Female = 4.5; F(1,46) = .003 p. = .954). That is, male and female candidates were selected with equal frequency in all conditions (Table 1).

Managerial attributes that are typical of either successful managers and men or successful managers and women exerted a large and highly significant influence on the hiring decision (Table 2). Specifically, mean rankings

of candidates with Manager/Men attributes were substantially higher than mean rankings of those with Manager/Women attributes (M/M = 3.4, M/W = 5.6; $F(1,46) = 90.43$, $p. < .001$). There were no significant interactions of managerial attributes with sex ($F(1,46) = 2.57$, $p. = .116$). The main effect size as measured by eta^2 was calculated at .66.

The data supported the attractiveness hypothesis. Attractive applicants were ranked significantly higher than unattractive applicants (Table 3: Attractive = 4.2, Unattractive = 4.8; $F(1,46) = 6.48$, $p. < .014$). The main effect size as measured by eta^2 was calculated at .12. Further, there was a significant main effect for attractiveness on eight adjective trait scales (Table 3). Previously rated attractive applicants were seen as better organized, more qualified, friendlier, more attractive, stronger leaders, more aggressive, and as having more goodness. There were no significant interactions of attractiveness with sex ($F(1,46) = .122$, $p. = .729$) or managerial attributes ($F(1,46) = .002$, $p. = .965$). The 3-way interaction was also non significant ($F(1,46) = 1.58$, $p. = .314$).

DISCUSSION

Overall, these data supported both the Managerial Attributes Hypothesis and the Attractiveness Hypothesis. The Sex Bias Hypothesis was not supported.

The Managerial Attributes Hypothesis: Managerial attributes had by far the largest effect in this study, accounting for 66% of variance in rankings. Such evidence suggests that Manager/Men attributes of leader ability, aggressiveness, independent thinking, objectivity, decisiveness and emotional stability are very salient and highly valued managerial traits in our society. Also supported are assertions of a general belief that to be successful in powerful and prestigious managerial positions requires these Manager/Men traits (Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979). Further, the data show that the Manager/Women traits of intuitiveness, understanding, helpfulness, humanitarian values, neatness, and awareness of other's feelings were treated as substantially less valued managerial traits. Schein (1973) did show that successful managers are perceived to possess the Manager/Women traits, but the current study demonstrated that selection priority is given to men and women exhibiting the Manager/Men attribute set.

These findings have important implications for

prospective managerial applicants. Specifically, resumes should describe past accomplishments using adjectives that are jointly ascribed to successful managers and men and not those attributed jointly to successful managers and women. Resumes suggesting the Manager/Men attribute set were far more likely to have significant favorable impact on selection personnel. In contrast, the Manager/Women attribute set, when used alone to portray salient applicant qualifications, could not compete against similar descriptions suggesting Manager/Men attributes.

The Attractiveness Hypothesis: Consonant with the Attractiveness Hypothesis the evidence in this study suggests that the photographs evoked a "goodness" dimension that impacted the rank ordering of applicants for a high level executive position. Attractive applicants, regardless of sex or managerial attributes, were ranked higher than unattractive candidates. This means that attractiveness does have the potential of biasing the evaluation of subsequent written qualifications. This suggests that written information should be assessed by selection committees before observing accompanying photographs or conducting personal interviews. At the same time, it is important for managerial applicants to project their most attractive image in contacts with prospective employers. These data contradict previous findings that attractiveness works against women in managerial jobs (Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979).

The Sex Bias Hypothesis: There was no evidence of

systematic selection of men over women for an important executive post. What happened to the traditional feminine sex role stereotype? First, it is clear from bipolar adjective data that subjects did indeed see the women as feminine and the men as masculine. Also, they had traditional perceptions of attractive women as more feminine and attractive men as more masculine than unattractive men and women. However, these strong sex role perceptions had no discernable effect on the ranking judgments. The evidence suggests that when people are provided with well documented and equally salient attribute qualifications about candidates, men and women have an equal chance for managerial selection. Under these ideal conditions, managers and employed business students simulating responsibility for important hiring decisions did not fall back on the sex role stereotype of women as "non-managers."

Limitations of the Study: Obviously, one should be cautious drawing conclusions from laboratory simulation studies. In such studies the information available to subjects is specific and controlled. In real selection situations resumes may not only contain irrelevant information, the data may not be presented clearly. It is possible that the resulting ambiguity might cause subjects to fall back on stereotypes to a greater extent than they do in simulation research. Never the less, the overall absence of sex effects for both subjects and applicants in the present study demonstrated that sex was not a factor in making hiring decisions

in a situation where qualifications were clear and equally superior for men and women. Further, the candidates' perceived managerial attributes exerted a strong influence on the hiring decision while attractive men and women had an advantage over equally qualified unattractive candidates.

Table 1 Applicant Sex Condition Statistics

DEPENDENT VARIABLES	MEANS M	MEANS F	MEAN SQUARE[a]	F	p<	Eta^2
Rank	4.5	4.5	.01 3.21	.00	.95	.00
Organized-Unorganized	7.5	7.5	.13 1.36	.10	.76	.00
Qualified-Unqualified	6.8	6.7	.32[b] 1.83	.18	.68	.00
Friendly-Unfriendly	6.6	6.7	.96 1.37	.70	.41	.01
Feeling-Unfeeling	6.5	6.6	1.41 2.08	.68	.42	.01
Good-Bad	7.2	7.0	2.56 1.41	1.81	.19	.04
Attractive-Unattractive	5.8	6.5	50.63[b] 1.76	28.73	.001	.38
Strong Leader-Weak Leader	7.0	6.9	.27 1.14	.23	.63	.00
People Oriented-Not P.O.	7.0	7.1	1.06 2.26	.47	.50	.01
Aggressive-Unaggressive	6.9	7.0	1.06[b] 1.41	.75	.39	.02
Intuitive-Unintuitive	6.6	6.7	.10 1.07	.09	.77	.00
Masculine-Feminine	6.8	3.4	1048.89[b] 8.63	121.47	.001	.73
Emotional-Unemotional	5.1	5.2	2.09 1.39	1.10	.30	.02
Confidence	7.0	7.3	8.34 2.08	4.00	.051	.08

[a]The upper value is effect MS; the lower value is error MS.

[b]df = (1,45); For all other effects df = (1,46).

Table 2 Managerial Attributes Condition Statistics

DEPENDENT VARIABLES	MEANS M/M	MEANS M/W	MEAN SQUARE[a]	F	p	Eta^2
Rank	3.4	5.6	447.07 4.94	90.43	.001	.663
Organized-Unorganized	7.8	7.2	38.94 1.87	20.84	.001	.312
Qualified-Unqualified	7.2	6.3	87.13[b] 3.50	24.87	.001	.355
Friendly-Unfriendly	6.2	7.2	89.07 2.46	36.16	.001	.44
Feeling-Unfeeling	6.0	7.1	103.22 3.74	27.62	.001	.375
Good-Bad	7.5	6.7	54.39 2.92	18.60	.001	.283
Attractive-Unattractive	6.3	6.0	6.65[b] 1.09	6.11	.017	.11
Strong Leader-Weak Leader	7.4	6.5	90.04 2.93	30.75	.001	.40
People Oriented-Not P.O.	6.3	7.7	171.59 2.66	64.48	.001	.584
Aggressive-Unaggressive	7.4	6.4	98.04[b] 2.85	34.45	.001	.425
Intuitive-Unintuitive	6.5	6.8	8.34 2.22	3.76	.059	.075
Masculine-Feminine	5.4	4.9	25.54[b] 1.58	16.13	.001	.263
Emotional-Unemotional	4.5	5.8	171.59 4.20	40.86	.001	.47
Confidence	7.3	7.1	7.19 2.03	3.54	.066	.07

[a]The upper value is effect MS; the lower value is error MS.

[b]df = (1,45); For all other effects df = (1,46).

Table 3 Attractiveness Condition Statistics

DEPENDENT VARIABLES	MEANS A	MEANS U	MEAN SQUARE[a]	F	p<	Eta^2
Rank	4.2	4.8	38.30 5.91	6.48	.014	.124
Organized-Disorganized	7.6	7.3	5.88 1.38	4.26	.045	.084
Qualified-Unqualified	6.9	6.6	11.94[b] 2.64	4.52	.039	.091
Friendly-Unfriendly	6.9	6.4	23.00 2.90	7.93	.007	.147
Feeling-Unfeeling	6.7	6.4	6.92 2.21	3.13	.084	.06
Good-Bad	7.3	6.8	23.00 .76	30.34	.001	.427
Attractive-Unattractive	7.9	4.4	1096.18[b] 7.11	154.2[illegible]	.001	.77[illegible]
Strong Leader-Weak Leader	7.2	6.7	17.88 1.70	10.50	.002	.186
People Oriented-Not P.O.	7.1	6.9	4.69 2.65	1.77	.190	.04
Aggressive-Unaggressive	7.1	6.7	17.88[b] 2.08	8.59	.005	.159
Intuitive-Unintuitive	6.8	6.5	4.69 3.20	1.47	.232	.03
Masculine-Feminine	4.9	5.3	13.79[b] 1.69	8.14	.007	.01
Emotional-Unemotional	5.2	5.1	.52 1.13	.46	.501	.01
Confidence	7.1	7.3	3.07 1.87	1.64	.207	.03

[a]The upper value is effect MS; the lower value is error MS.

[b]df = (1,45); For all other effects df = (1,46).

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AUTHOR NOTES

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FOOTNOTES

[1]Bem (1974) has shown that the masculine and feminine domains are independent. Men and women can be androgynous. That is, they can be both masculine and feminine, both dominant and submissive, both independent and dependent. Never the less, society at large conceptualizes masculine and feminine as bipolar ends of a single continuum; accordingly, a person has had to be either masculine or feminine, but not both.